

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-13 DPW-01 AID-20 DRC-01 /165 W

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R 200930Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7288

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

USDEL JEC PARIS

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL CAN THO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 16743

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT VS

SUBJ: FORMER PRIME MINISTER TAM VISITS SAIGON: "BAO DAI RETURN"

SPECULATION QUIETED BY REUTERS INTERVIEW

REF: SAIGON 16418

1. TAM'S RETURN: ON SEPT 14 FORMER PRIME MINISTER NGUYEN VAN TAM RETURNED TO SAIGON AFTER ALMOST TWENTY YEARS IN EXILE. HE WAS GREETED AT THE SAIGON AIRPORT VIP LOUNGE BY ABOUT A DOZEN FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND TAKEN TO HIS RESIDENCE IN DOWNTOWN SAIGON. THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS THAT TAM WAS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS SON, NGUYEN VAN HINH, A GENERAL ON ACTIVE DUTY WITH THE FRENCH ARMED FORCES, AND BY OTHER EXPATRIATES SUCH AS NGUYEN HUU CHAU AND VUONG VAN DONG. THESE RUMORS APPEAR TO BE UNTRUE; THEY WERE DENIED ON SEPT 17 BY A GVN SPOKESMAN. GVN SPOKESMAN HAVE TERMED TAM'S TRIP A "PERSONAL" MATTER AND HAVE DECLINED TO COMMENT FURTHER ON HIS ACTIVITIES. IT HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN WIDELY REPORTED IN THE PRESS THAT PERMISSION FOR TAM TO VISIT SVN WAS CONDITIONED ON AN AGREEMENT THAT HE STAY CLEAR OF POLITICS. THIS SEEMS LIKELY.

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2. ALTHOUGH TAM'S ARRIVAL SET OFF A WAVE OF RUMOR, SPECULATION HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT DAMPENED BY TAM'S OWN LOW-KEY STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS AND BY EX-EMPEROR BAO DAI'S SEPT 12 PARIS REUTERS INTERVIEW IN WHICH HE DENIED HE WAS SEEKING TO RETURN TO SVN SOON (SEE PARAS 4 AND 5 BELOW). TAM HAS GIVEN AN INTERVIEW TO THE SAIGON DAILY DAN LUAN IN WHICH HE ASSERTS THAT HIS RETURN WAS "ARRANGED" BY VICE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN HUONG, A FELLOW SOUTHERNER AND AN OLD FRIEND. TAM VISITED HUONG SHORTLY AFTER HIS ARRIVAL.

3. IT IS REPORTED THAT TAM WILL STAY IN SVN ONLY A FEW WEEKS.

4. BAO DAI RUMORS: REFTEL NOTED THAT SAIGON WAS UNDERGOING ONE OF ITS PERIODIC SPATES OF "BAO DAI TO RETURN" RUMORS. ON SEPT 12 BAO DAI GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO REUTERS IN PARIS WHICH HAS GREATLY DAMPENED SUCH SPECULATION (AND DISAPPOINTED THOSE HERE WHO WERE BEATING THE BAO DAI DRUM). ACCORDING TO REUTERS, BAO DAI DISMISSED AS "UTTER NONSENSE" RUMORS OF HIS PENDING RETURN TO SVN. HE ASSERTED THAT NO ONE IN SVN HAS ANY RIGHT TO SPEAK FOR HIM. BAO DAI FURTHERMORE STATED, ACCORDING TO REUTERS, THAT "IN SAIGON TODAY WE HAVE A RESPONSIBLE LEADER, PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU; ALL VIETNAMESE ARE DUTY BOUND TO HELP HIM IN HIS TASKS, WE MUST DO NOTHING TO IMPEDE HIS WORK". FINALLY, THE EX-EMPEROR IS REPORTED TO HAVE ASSERTED THAT HE IS "NOT INTERESTED" IN THE SO-CALLED "THIRD FORCE", WHICH "ANYBODY AND EVERYBODY CAN (SAY THEY) LEAD". RATHER THAN ENGAGE IN SUCH ACTIVITIES, HE SAID HE WANTED TO "WARN MY COUNTRYMEN THAT THEY MUST UNITE RATHER THAN DISPERSE THEIR EFFORTS, AND ALLOW PRESIDENT THIEU TO CARRY ON WITH HIS TASK OF LEADING THE NATION IN THE PRESENT DIFFICULT TIMES. OTHERWISE, WE WOULD BE PLAYING INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNIST FORCES."

5. THE REUTERS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN WIDELY PLAYED BY THE SAIGON PRESS AND THIS HAS GREATLY AIDED IN DAMPENING SPECULATION THAT THE VISIT OF NGUYEN VAN TAM IS SOMEHOW CONNECTED WITH A BAO DAI INITIATIVE.
APPLING

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